



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES**  
*A Healthcare Service Agency*

NED LAMONT  
GOVERNOR

MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON, PH.D.  
COMMISSIONER

**Testimony by Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Commissioner**  
**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
**Before the Judiciary Committee**

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and I am thankful for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 5019, An Act Concerning Fair Futures Following Erasure of Criminal Records

DMHAS is a health care agency that provides prevention, treatment and recovery services to individuals with behavioral health conditions. DMHAS' treatment and recovery services are the safety net services for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured. Since people who are experiencing a mental health crisis are more likely to encounter police than get medical help, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, many of the people DMHAS serves have had contact with the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics sixty-four percent of jail inmates have a mental health problem.

The DMHAS Division of Forensic Services implements and coordinates specially-skilled evaluation and treatment services for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders who become involved in the criminal justice system. The Division works closely with the courts and other components of the criminal justice system. Our efforts are intended to promote recovery and prevent or limit criminal justice system involvement to the extent possible, to promote public safety and to coordinate activities with other state and private agencies. Services within the Division span the continuum of the criminal justice system from pre-booking to end of sentence after incarceration and return to the community. Forensic Services provide clinical programming, specialized consultation and evaluation services, specific intervention programs to divert people from the criminal justice system and into treatment where possible, programs to help people re-enter community living successfully after a period of incarceration, and training and consultation to the criminal justice system. In all these efforts, one of our overarching goals is the decriminalization of mental illness.

Often the people served by DMHAS have been convicted of a misdemeanor offense that can limit access to employment and housing opportunities. These opportunities are a vital part of recovery and access to them is imperative. DMHAS is in full support of legislation that erases drug possession convictions and most Class C and Class D misdemeanor convictions, except those involving family violence, sexual violence, DUIs, or bodily harm, after a person has gone seven years without another conviction. DMHAS is also supportive of the language in the act that waives fees for indigent pardon applicants which will also assist the people served by the agency.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Committee on this important issue.